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TAGS: PGOV PREL PREF PHUM SOCI MOPS SU
SUBJECT: SPLM MP ON POSSIBLE ABYEI AGREEMENT, BORDER CLASH

REF: A. KHARTOUM 313

IB. KHARTOUM 308
IC. KHARTOUM 256

I1. (SBU) Summary: According to ethnic-Misseriya SPLM MP Mohamed Gour, the most recent armed clash in the Abyei region was the result of growing friction between poorly disciplined local SPLA units and young Misseriya herdsmen. He confirmed that the SPLM and NCP have reached agreement on a joint administration of Abyei and said he will help SPLM-appointed administrator Edward Lino hold workshops in the area to inform the public and reduce ethnic tensions. He asserted that there is no fundamental conflict between Abyei's Misseriya and Ngok Dinka and that a long-term resolution will be worked out locally between the two groups and not between Khartoum and Juba. End Summary.

NCP and SPLM Agree on Abyei Administration

I2. (SBU) On March 4, Econoff and Political FSN met with Mohamed Gour, an ethnic Misseriya from Abyei and an SPLM member of the National Assembly representing the region. Gour confirmed reports that the NCP and the SPLM have reached an agreement on the disputed administration of Abyei and that Pagan Amun and Deng Alor have flown to Juba to brief GoSS President Salva Kiir.

I3. (SBU) Gour stated that he did not know the specifics of the agreement, but said he hopes that it will lead to peace. (Note: Other sources indicate that the agreement provides for an SPLM-appointed administrator (Edward Lino) and an NCP-appointed deputy. SPLM and NCP will divide positions in Lino's cabinet. As far as we know there is no agreement yet on Abyei's northern border, which Deng Alor told SE Williamson last week was the sticking point. End Note.) Gour added he will assist Edward Lino in organizing a workshop in Abyei to inform the population and reduce tensions.

Escalating Provocations Lead to Violent Clash

I4. (SBU) Gour blamed the most recent, March 1 clash along the 1956 border (refs. a and b) on gradually escalating mutual taunts and provocations between local SPLA units and young Misseriya herdsmen. According to Gour, this culminated on March 1 when poorly disciplined SPLA soldiers began shooting Misseriya cattle, provoking a violent response from the herdsmen.

I5. (SBU) Tensions between herdsmen and the SPLA have been growing for some time, however, as local SPLA commanders have been demanding that Misseriya, migrating south with their cattle, surrender their arms (consisting mostly, Gour said, of hunting weapons) and pay 5 Sudanese Pounds per cow before crossing the border to graze in Bahr el Ghazal. The herdsmen refused both, saying they need the arms to

protect themselves and their cattle. They also strongly suspect that the money was going into the pockets of the SPLA commanders and not to the Government of South Sudan.

We can Get Along If Left Alone

¶6. (SBU) According to Gour, there is no fundamental conflict between Abyei's ethnic Misseriya and Ngok Dinka. The two groups have lived side-by-side for decades, often caring for each other's children. Gour blamed outside interference for the decline in relations. He said that the NCP, alarmed by the SPLA's success in recruiting Misseriya, have been inciting the tribe against the Ngok Dinka with claims that their access to grazing lands south of the 1956 boundary will be blocked and that the "infidels" will push them off land further north. To counter SPLA recruitment, the NCP also has been paying 1000 Sudanese Pound (500 US dollars) bounties to volunteers for the Popular Defense Force militias.

¶7. (SBU) Gour asserted that the interests of the Misseriya lie with the SPLM and the South, rather than with the NCP and the North. The Misseriya spend nine months a year grazing their cattle south of the 1956 border. Gour and others originally were attracted to the SPLM by John Garang's vision of a united, democratic Sudan that can accommodate marginalized groups. No one has been more marginalized in Sudan than the Misseriya.

Only a Locally-Achieved Solution Will Stick

¶8. (SBU) Gour repeated his view (ref c) that any long-term solution to the Abyei issue must be based on a local understanding between Ngok Dinka and Misseriya. He is confident that, using traditional means of consultation, the two groups will be able to find a means to accommodate each other's concerns. He contended that Khartoum and Juba cannot reach an independent agreement based on their own interests and expect to make it stick in Abyei.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) Gour provides yet another version of the immediate causes of the March 1 violence: essentially a clash of trigger-happy young hotheads with guns. (This tracks with ref. a statement that the Misseriya casualties "were just children.") This is a situation which could well recur anytime in the future. (Also worth noting is his insight that any SPLM-NCP accommodation on Abyei that does not take into account the views and interests of the local population will not endure for long.) Gour's account differs from continued SPLA reports in Juba that the clashes are caused primarily by Misseriya PDF armed by the SAF. That certainly seems to have been the case in the last two months when fighting began, caused in part by seasonal migration of the Misseriya herdsmen. However Gour himself is a member of the SPLM, and provides a more nuanced view of the most recent fighting there, which appears to have been caused by unruly SPLA soldiers north of the 1956 border.

FERNANDEZ